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- [Fact Sheet](#)
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- [Photo Gallery](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [USDA News](#)

- [Find a Service Center](#)

**Fact Sheet****U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Programs****Financial, Technical, and Educational Assistance for Landowners****Introduction**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers landowners financial, technical, and educational assistance to implement conservation practices on privately owned land. Using this help, farmers and ranchers apply practices that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance forest land, wetlands, grazing lands, and wildlife habitat. Incentives offered by USDA promote sustainable agricultural practices, which protect and conserve valuable farmland for future generations. USDA assistance also helps individuals and communities restore natural resources after floods, fires, or other natural disasters.

The following are brief overviews of cost-share programs managed by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Forest Service. For more details, contact your local USDA Service Center.

**Conservation Reserve Program**

The Conservation Reserve Program reduces soil erosion, protects the Nation's ability to produce food and fiber, reduces sedimentation in streams and lakes, improves water quality, establishes wildlife habitat, and enhances forest and wetland resources. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices.

**Emergency Conservation Program**

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides financial assistance to farmers and ranchers for the restoration of farmlands on which normal farming operations have been impeded by natural disasters. ECP also helps with funds for carrying out emergency water conservation measures during periods of severe drought. Emergency conservation assistance is available for removing debris and restoring permanent fences, terraces, diversions, irrigation systems, and other conservation installations. Conservation problems that existed before a disaster are not eligible.

### **Emergency Watershed Protection Program**

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program is designed to reduce threats to life and property in the wake of natural disasters. It provides technical and cost sharing assistance. Assistance includes both removing and establishing vegetative cover; gully control, installing streambank protection devices; removing debris and sediment; and stabilizing levees, channels, and gullies. In subsequent storms, EWP projects protect homes, businesses, highways, and public facilities from further damage. The Secretary of Agriculture may purchase floodplain easements under EWP.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) works primarily in locally identified conservation priority areas where there are significant problems with natural resources. High priority is given to areas where State or local governments offer financial, technical, or educational assistance, and to areas where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality objectives. Activities must be carried out according to a conservation plan.

EQIP offers contracts that provide incentive payments and cost sharing for conservation practices, such as manure management systems, pest management, erosion control, and other practices to improve and maintain the health of natural resources.

### **Farmland Protection Program**

The Farmland Protection Program provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in use. Working through existing programs, USDA joins with State, tribal, or local governments to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the costs of purchasing the easements. To qualify, farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production.

### **Forestry Incentives Program**

The Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) supports good forest management practices on privately owned, nonindustrial forest lands nationwide. FIP is designed to benefit the environment while meeting future demands for wood products. Eligible practices are tree planting, timber stand improvement, site preparation for natural regeneration, and other related activities. FIP is available in counties designated by a Forest Service survey of eligible private timber acreage.

### **Small Watershed Program**

The Small Watershed Program works through local government sponsors and helps participants solve natural resource and related economic problems on a watershed basis.

Projects include watershed protection, flood prevention, erosion and sediment control, water supply, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, wetlands creation and restoration, and public recreation in watersheds of 250,000 or fewer acres. Both technical and financial assistance are available.

### **Stewardship Incentive Program**

The Stewardship Incentive Program provides technical and financial assistance to encourage nonindustrial private forest landowners to keep their lands and natural resources productive and healthy. Qualifying land includes rural lands with existing tree cover or land suitable for growing trees and which is owned by a private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe, or other legal private entity. Eligible landowners must have an approved Forest Stewardship Plan and own 1,000 or fewer acres of qualifying land. Authorizations may be obtained for exceptions of up to 5,000 acres.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program to restore wetlands. Participating landowners can establish conservation easements of either permanent or 30-year duration or can enter into restoration cost-share agreements where no easement is involved. In exchange for establishing a permanent easement, the landowner receives payment up to the agricultural value of the land and 100 percent of the restoration costs for restoring the wetland. The 30-year easement payment is 75 percent of what would be provided for a permanent easement on the same site and 75 percent of the restoration cost. The voluntary agreements are for a minimum 10-year duration and provide for 75 percent of the cost of restoring the involved wetlands. Easements set limits on how the lands may be used in the future. Restoration cost-share agreements establish wetland protection and restoration as the primary land use for the duration of the agreement. In all instances, landowners continue to control access to their land.

### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides financial incentives to develop habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands. Participants agree to implement a wildlife habitat development plan and USDA agrees to provide cost-share assistance for the initial implementation of wildlife habitat development practices. USDA and program participants enter into a cost-share agreement for wildlife habitat development. This agreement generally lasts a minimum of 5 years from the date that the contract is signed.

### **For more information**

Contact information for the 12 field offices in Alaska is available at [www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/fieldoffices.html](http://www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/fieldoffices.html), or by calling 907-761-7760.

**< [Back to News and Information](#)**

[▲ Back to Top](#)

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